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A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE



BY JACQUELYN BELL DESIGN MACKENZIE GEARY PHOTO MCCLANE GILL

How a store in Ames is supporting sustainable practices around the globe

When you walk into Worldly Goods on Main Street, you are immediately submerged into a small store packed with a variety of little trinkets, brightly colored clothing and even musical instruments. Everything is handmade. Most items are labeled with the country in which they were made — some even include a picture of the person who made it. You realize that this little shop contains a connection to more culture than you had ever expected to see in good ol' Ames, Iowa.

Worldly Goods is a fair trade store that sells goods made by artisans from over 50 different countries, and in exchange, they are provided with a living wage and safe working conditions at home. All of the items are made from recycled or sustainable items. They have items like purses made from recycled rubber tires, journals with paper made out of elephant poop from Sri Lanka and natural soaps from India. They sell everything from jewelry and clothing to coffee and chocolates.

"Most people don't even realize these things are happening," says Worldly Goods' store manager Andrea Gronau of the issues faced by some working adults in underdeveloped and developing countries.

The store was started in 1987 and is one of the few fair trade stores in Iowa. The store's mission is to "inspire social justice, sustainable livelihood and environmental resilience by providing a marketplace for artisans of the world to earn a living wage, support their families and develop their communities." Fair trade is based on partnerships with artisans and vendors in developing countries. They are paid a fair wage in exchange for their goods, which gives people all over the world an opportunity to provide for their families.

"We definitely believe in dignity, not charity. We are actually trying to bolster their local economies," said Gronau. Along with Gronau, an ISU alumna, caring volunteers from the community, including ISU students, help to run the store.

Buying even a small item can have a big impact.

"Most of our vendors are single women and this enables them to send their children to school, and that is such a proud moment because it breaks the cycle of poverty. This gives everyone a chance around the world. This person that is now able to go to school may turn out to be their country's next president," says Gronau.

The store operates as part of the Fair Trade Federation, which ensures that all aspects of the trade are moral and environmentally friendly. India, Kenya, Ecuador, Peru and Nepal are just a few of the countries from which the store receives items.

The store has close relationships with the artisans and vendors that they work with. The artisans are paid upfront and many of them are allowed to work from home so they can care for their children. Gronau and the volunteers have contact with many of the artisans and have even Skyped with them on occasion.

“Most of our artisans are women, raising the next generation of people that have to take care of our world. They need to be supported.”

One of the vendors that the store works with, The Conscious Connections, creates a felt doll called ‘Period Patti’ that the store sells for \$10. The proceeds from the dolls go directly back to these women in Nepal so they can make reusable menstrual pads for girls. This gives the girls a chance to go to school every week of the month.

“That’s something that you and I take for granted here,” says Gronau.

The store is involved with another project, Beads For Learning. The profits from

the sales of these bracelets go directly to scholarships for students in Kenya where, if families have enough money, they will only send their oldest son to school. Through these scholarships, many Kenyan girls are having their first chance at an education. Gronau says the most popular item in the store is the chocolate.

“There is such a big problem in East Africa where they use child labor to pick the cocoa beans to make chocolate. The children have to pick the beans or their family won’t be able to eat.”

Gronau says some of the most famous chocolate companies are guilty of this, but things are getting better.

“Hershey’s has finally agreed by 2020 to take child labor out of its supply chain, but Godiva chocolate still uses it.”

Gronau invests a lot of time and effort in running the store, but she says it’s worth it. “I absolutely love my job,” says Gronau.

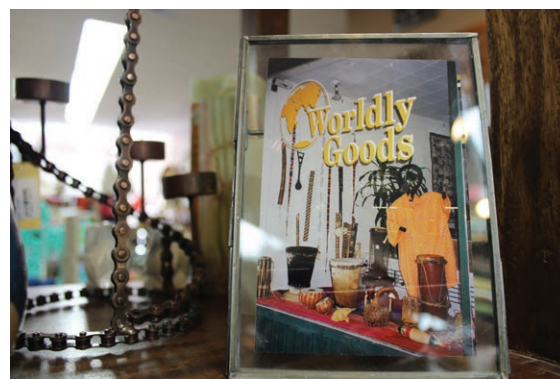
“I’ve always been involved in fair trade and supported the principles, so it was natural for me to connect Worldly Goods with the community. I have dedicated my life at the moment to this store.”

The store also occasionally holds benefit shopping nights for local nonprofits.

The store allows them to come in for a three-hour time period and receive 15 to 20 percent of the profits in exchange for their support of fair trade.

The store does an array of local projects, such as donating shoes, donating fair trade items for community projects and even cooking meals for the women’s shelter.

“This little place is impacting all over the world.”



Global Gifts

A few items you can find in the store

- Salt stone shot glasses (perfect for tequila)
- Purses made from recycled rubber tires
- Soap nuts for washing clothes (no chemicals, sustainable and natural)
- Purses made with bone from animals that died naturally
- Purses made from leather misprinted
- Wrangler jean labels
- Hamper made from recycled saris
- Dried fruits from Colombia
- Variety of musical instruments
- Paper made from elephant poop in Sri Lanka
- Journals made from cruelty free leather and cotton rag paper from India
- Natural soaps from India
- Wooden boxes made from reclaimed wood in India
- Many items made of Kisii stone from Kenya
- Scarves, hats, gloves (seasonal)



“This little place is impacting all over the world.”